HOW DO CHINESE STUDENTS CREATE A SENSE OF HOME IN GRONINGEN?

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SUMMARY

Groningen is increasing as a popular destination for international students. Groningen has more than 5400 students of which approximately 15% is an international student with over 120 different nationalities (University of Groningen, 2016). China sent 179,800 students abroad in 2008 and this number is growing; this makes China the largest source country of international students in the world (Xiang & Shen, 2009). As the space in Groningen becomes a shared space between Dutch and international students, the perception, function and meaning of certain places are likely to change. In particular, Zernike Campus, the University Library (UB), Academic building or even the streets of Groningen, are places in which new student identities are formed. The personal journey of temporary migration for a student can bring emotional or sentimental attachment to a space, which then becomes a place (Al-Ali & Khoser, 2002). When temporary students come to Groningen, they face a trajectory of creating a sense of home within a new community for which it can take many years to reach a point where one feels 'a sense of community' (Cicognani *et al.*, 2011). How does this play out for international students whom visit Groningen for a relatively short period of time? How do they function, assimilate and create a sense of place in a completely different city, across the globe?

This research paper will focus on the following research question: **How do Chinese students create a sense of home during their stay in Groningen?** Four sub-questions have been drawn upon to answer this research question;

- What is a sense of home?
- How can a sense of home be placed within the context of a temporary home?
- Which factors are the most important in the process of creating a sense of home?
- How does creating a sense of home influence the lived experience of the Chinese students?

With these sub-questions as a basis, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with a set of eight Chinese students, ranging from two years in Groningen for a Bachelors degree to four years in Groningen for a Bachelor/Masters degree.

It can be concluded that Chinese students in Groningen try creating a sense of home in Groningen by keeping to their own comfort zone; their food culture plays the part in most concepts; cultural activities are celebrated with food, friends are met over dinner and personal belongings from China are mostly food related. In creating their sense of home within Groningen, practicality plays the upper hand where study is important and where their future career remains their main focus as well as returning to China once finished in Groningen.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The international student community in Groningen is a growing phenomenon. With more than 5400 students, approximately 15% of which are international students (University of Groningen, 2016) with 120 different nationalities. The largest Asian nationality are the Chinese, representing 0.87% of the total student body (University of Groningen, 2016). The relatively large presence of Chinese students can be contributed to the rapid economic growth in China and the subsequent rise of the middle class, with ambitions of having a higher education (Kell & Vogel, 2010). In 2008, China sent around 179,800 students abroad, which makes China the largest source country of international students in the world (Xiang & Shen, 2009). As Groningen becomes a more popular destination for international students, the more important the space becomes where students move around.

These everyday spaces can be lecture rooms, Zernike Campus, the University Library (UB) or other spaces where students interact; these spaces directly influence and form their university experience (Holton & Riley, 2015). Student identities can be formed within spaces of leisure where the physical space can give us meaning, order and stability in our lives. Yet, these identities are much more formed when we have a sense of the place. This is much more related to personal experiences and where we live; the sentiment and emotional attachment that one might have with a space (Al-Ali & Khoser, 2002).

The most important aspect of a student identity can be found within place identity, which refers to the relationship between people and places where the person has the space to develop an individual identity have the ability to interpret a sense of self and therefore induce a sense of home (Cuba & Hummon, 1993, Cicognani *et al*., 2011). More geographically defined, the word 'community' would be appropriate; it appropriates physical boundaries too and represents an extension of the self. As an extension of the home, a community can give people a feeling of belonging and sharing wants and needs. According to Cicognani *et al*. (2011), it can take years to reach the point of feeling a 'sense of community'.

Drawing a conclusion from above statements, as Cuba & Hummon (1993) also concur, is it then that a sense of placelessness is a natural consequence of mobility? Accordingly, are international students, moving to Groningen, faced with this possibility? Is it possible for student mobility to form a sense of community, or more specifically, a sense of home, in a time span of two to three years? Subsequently, the concept of home-making is what this research project will focus on.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Drawing from the background information above, the main research question for this research paper will be as follows:

How do Chinese students create a sense of home during their stay in Groningen?

From there, the following sub questions come forward, where the research paper will start off with an answer to the first question;

- What is a sense of home?

It will then focus to a sense of home within a temporary context;

- How can a sense of home be placed within the context of a temporary home?

When a temporary home within a sense of home is placed, research should then conclude which factors were important in this process;

- Which factors are the most important in the process of creating a sense of home?

Then the experience of Chinese students in Groningen will be looked at and be linked to how creating a sense of home can influence this;

- How does creating a sense of home influence the lived experience of the Chinese students?

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THESIS

The research project is structured as follow; first a theoretical framework sets out the boundaries for the research question, herein, the four lead themes will be explained and combined into a conceptual model. After the conceptual model, the methodology follows, explaining how the data were collected, processed and analysed within an in-depth semi-structured interview framework. The questions posed during the interview are justified and decisions made over the interview process are explained. A reflection on the data methods and limitations are also included. Following this, the results are presented and a set of conclusions made with regards to the sub-questions stated above. Finally, an overall conclusion is set along with a discussion of limitations and recommendations for follow up research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A sense of home can be seen as a multi facetted concept – it can be experienced in many different ways – as a daily routine, emotional or symbolic connections or as concrete fixed locations. It can be a residence or where one's family is. Spatially, a house can be a home in a city, region or neighbourhood. Emotionally, it can be developed through routines or knowledge, it can develop through investing resources, emotions and emanate familiarity (Wiles, 2008).

The Dictionary of Human Geography (2013, p.339) defines *home* as "*an emotive place and spatial imaginary that encompasses lived experiences of everyday, domestic life alongside a wider sense of being and belonging in the world*". Cuba & Hummon (1993) tie in the concept of home with how individuals routinely construct place identities, which allows people to develop their self and have a sense of being at home. Consequently, what can be construed as 'not home?'; Al-Ali & Khoser (2002) see this as the social 'other'. It is the unknown, foreign places, different traditions are seen as not home, this allows for a deeper sense of what home is. Feeling at home is defined as the "*positive affective state of psychological comfort derived from feeling at ease, familiar…*" (Aroian, 1990, p.8). It is seen as no longer experiencing a feeling of having to resettle into a different culture, but feeling familiar with customs and culture (Aroian, 1990); much to what Chinese students will face when leaving their country and resettling into Groningen. Their integration into the Dutch culture can trigger a need to feel closer to home.

Chinese students moving to Groningen, face a temporary dislodgement from their familial home. The meaning of their own home in Groningen can be a reference to their own past self and their actions. It is important to these students that a specific place that has emotional significance can help with the continuity of their identity as such significant move in their life can alter their own behaviour (Chow & Healey, 2008). Tied into this is that students need to have the 'ability to fit in', interact with their new environment (Ward & Kennedy, 1999) which could mean that a lack of social ties with native people can influence their stay. These factors can make it more difficult to adjust to their new environment (Putnam, 2007).

The following subsections will contain an explanation of different concepts which are necessary to understand the processes behind developing a sense of home; nostalgic illusion connects to this into creating a sense of belonging in the place one tries to call home, sense of place focuses on the relations and interactions that take place while creating a sense of home whereas place attachment focuses on positive experiences that occur which contribute to a sense of home. Place identity is about what someone has in common with their new home and how that process helps create a sense of home. In 2.6 Conceptual Model, a visual representation is given of the above concepts and how culture of food is intertwined within these concepts throughout the lives of the participants and how these factors combined create a sense of home.

2.1 NOSTALGIC ILLUSION

Nostalgic illusion is a concept that shows how mobility can trigger a wanting for familiar culture by recapturing and creating familiar past activities to maintain a sense of belonging instead of facing the 'other' culture (Kong, 1999). This can take form in maintaining customs, having social gatherings with similar cultures or staying close to tradition. It could also include going to public places such as social gatherings, restaurants or bars which can recreate this feeling of being at home (Kong, 1999).

For international students, staying a short period of time, they might want to immerse themselves into the Dutch culture, but in fear of the 'other', a new language and very different culture, students might congregate together to find safety and comfort within their own familiar home, their own sense of place. This could include visiting Chinese restaurants, going to Karaoke bars, but also to recreate their 'home feeling' by visiting other Chinese families they may know in the area.

2.2 SENSE OF PLACE

Place is a term to not only denote the physical aspects but also the meanings and emotions that are associated with that space (Wright, 200). This can be for example be a place where Chinese students interact with their friends; that space becomes a place since emotions get attached to it. ***Sense of place*** is a construct of relations and interactions, within the place itself and influences from the outside (Convery *et al*., 2012). The process of creating a sense of place is a personal one, though not entirely the result of one individual's feelings and meanings; a process of receiving, reconstructing and creating an identity which allows a space to become a place (Hague & Jenkins, 2005).

As Holton & Riley (2015) point out, a sense of place doesn't have to be a construct that has been influenced by only cultural affiliations or heritage or other processes. Belongings can also play a significant role in anchoring somewhere. It is a multi-sited aspect, it is not only about the accommodation for the students in Groningen but also their familial home, which they will return to at the end of term.

Belongings that students own, may have a significant role in creating a sense of place that it gives a connection or trigger a memory. For long-term students, the memories attached to belongings may fade, allowing the student to let go more of their (familial) home, and create a new home (Holton & Riley, 2015) with unique moments and a chance to bond with a new place, thus creating place attachment (Low & Altman, 2012).

2.3 PLACE ATTACHMENT

Attaching oneself to a certain place, the development of positive experiences, behaviours or cognitive ties between an individual and their environment (Smith, 2009); the process of attaching oneself and the product of this process is called **place attachment** ((Devine-Wright, 2009). This differs from a sense of place in that it is purely the experience of living in place that triggers feelings of attachment and the outcome of the process; thus the experience of living in a place, without the influence from the outside altering any positive or negative feelings one might have.

Place attachment is an individualistic process where there is a positive emotional connection with familiar locations such as a home or neighbourhood (Devine-Wright, 2009). More so, it could be described as the affective bond one might establish with an area, where one would like to stay and feel safe (Hernandez *et al*., 2007). The extent of affection can be developed towards places in different sizes and functions; their house, neighbourhood, communities or in a geographical way; people may feel attached to places that vastly differ from their hometown because it is so different.

According to Hernandez *et al*. (2007), place attachment arises from the length of the residency and the feeling of a social belonging. Scannell & Gifford (2010) think that it can be divided into social and physical attachment; where both can influence the bond. Social attachment consists mainly of social ties, belongingness to the neighbourhood and familiarity with fellow residents whereas physical attachment is predicted by length of residence, ownership and plans to stay (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

It could be interesting, to see how mobility influences this process as it is often a temporary situation for international students in Groningen. Whether their duration affects their willingness to create attachment to Groningen and how they experience this transformation during their stay. Also, how their social belonging has developed over the years the students have been here. Has it increased since they started living here or are they feeling more detached than ever?

2.4 PLACE IDENTITY

Where place attachment is about the emotional connection to a certain place, where they want to stay and feel comfortable and safe, *place identity* reflects more how the physical and symbolic characteristics contribute to an individual's sense of identity (Devine-Wright, 2009). And with this identity, establishing what the person has in common with that place; a relationship based on similarities and differences with other places (Hague & Jenkins, 2005).

Place identity can be seen as the place becoming part of the personal identity, which develops according to the nature of interactions that occur in the area. It is a fragile term though; identifying with a place can be influenced by the extent of attachment; if there is a feeling of security, one might be more willing to identify with a place instead of rejecting the place as part of themselves (Devine-Wright, 2009).

For foreign students living in a student city like Groningen, security is an important factor. Attachment and identity are intertwined concepts and will each be influenced by one another and therefore will be interesting will be to see how this translates back into student (temporary) mobility and see if the factor of time influenced the behaviour of attachment and identity.

2.5 CULTURE OF FOOD

A final important factor to look at is the Chinese food culture. According to Newman (2004, p.11) food is key to how Chinese people find "*connections to past, place and people*". This would mean that relating this to terms like place identity, place attachment, sense of place and nostalgic illusion, gives it a new dimension to the research question in how Chinese students create a place of home in Groningen because their food culture is such an important aspect to their homemaking, place creating and sense of belonging. This cultural aspect can be traced back to 2000 BCE; when the earliest Chinese myths and legends were created. They all had a connection to food, or the creation thereof; one is about a sovereign teaching to make fire, another ruler knew about fish nets yet another myth is about the domestication and raising of animals (Newman, 2004).

The concept of food is intertwined within many aspects of their lives; in medicine, religion, emotion and language (Newman, 2004) but also initiates social transformations (Jing, 2000). One particular example of this is a standard greeting in Chinese of "*have you eaten yet*", which can be seen as an equivalent of the English "*how are you*" to which the standard answer is "*good*", similarly in Chinese the standard answer is always "*yes*" (Lafleur, 2003). This shows how food represents a central part part of daily life – it is normalized within everyday conversation. An example of emotional integration of food is that one of the seven Chinese emotions, is the irregularity of food and drink (Bond, 1993), this stems from the period that there was poverty and famine. Food as an emotion makes it part of our mental state, not only a physical state of being hungry. It becomes an integral part of a normal functioning human being (Bond, 1993). Taken together, the importance of food for the Chinese culture is clear, it is fundamental to many aspects of daily life. It will therefore be interesting to see how food plays a role in the daily lives of the Chinese students in Groningen and see if food is an important focal point for maintaining their sense of identity, for forming place attachment and a sense of home but also familiarity within a different culture for the Chinese students.
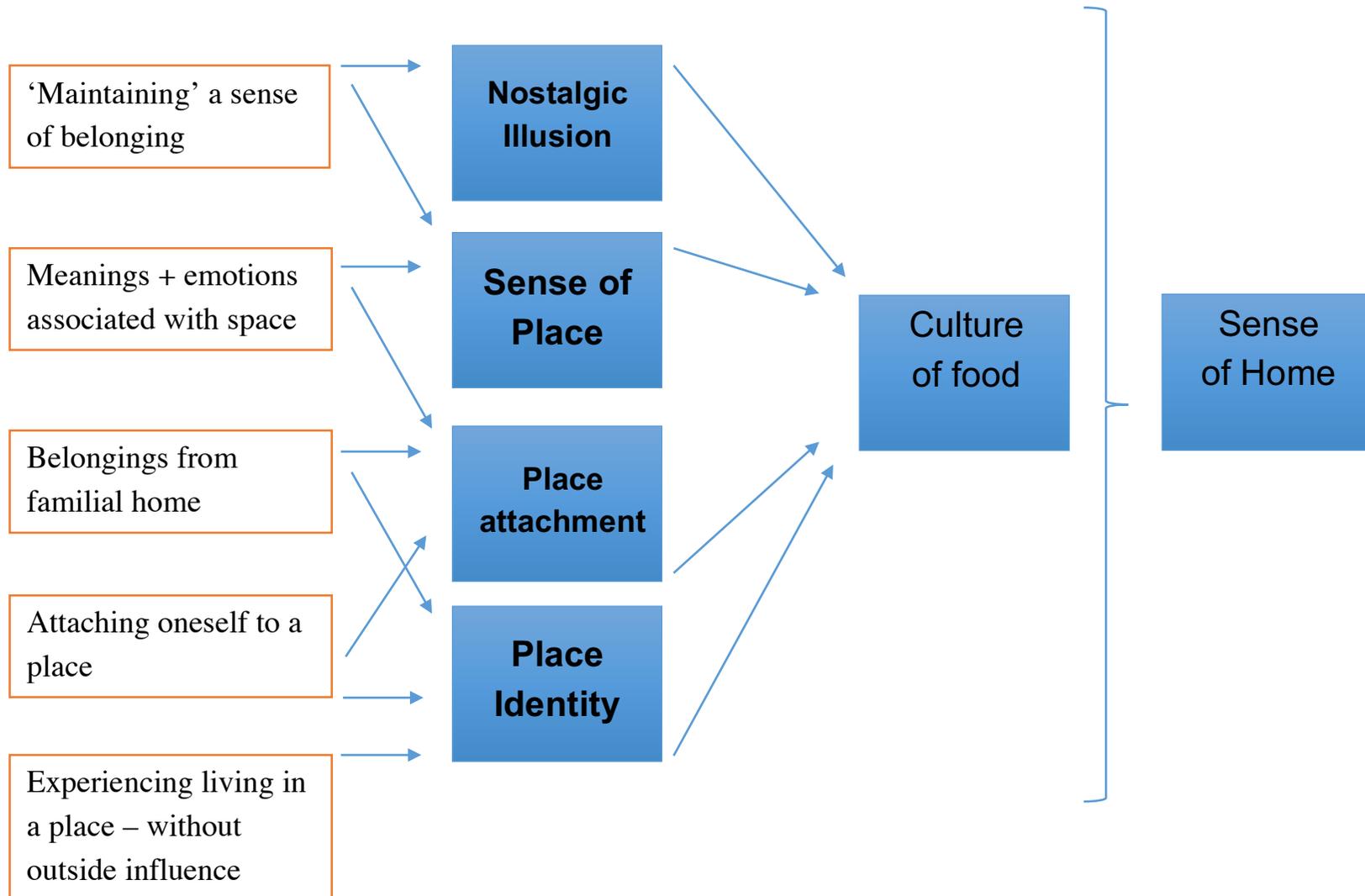
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH METHOD

A few different instruments of data gathering can be used. Quantitative methods are mainly used for theories and hypotheses that are being tested and the main goal is to develop a general theory that would enable to predict, explain and understand an occurrence. (Abawi, 2008). Qualitative research is more focused on a particular phenomenon or interests. The aim is usually to study objects in their natural setting and trying to make sense of or interpret the meanings people bring to them. The goal of qualitative research is to understand a social or human phenomenon from different perspectives (Abawi, 2008). Since the main goal of this thesis is to find out how Chinese students create a sense of home in Groningen, a qualitative research method is deemed most appropriate.

There are several ways of conducting qualitative research. The most frequent ones to use are interviews, participant observation and written survey's. Participant observation is to carefully document a people's culture, their pattern of living and to see their interactions and reactions. Written surveys are less personal, and more for factual or opinionated information that one might need (Saldana, 2011). Since both a participant observation and a written survey don't seem to match the research question, it has been chosen to do an interview; this is an effective way of documenting, in their own words, an individuals' feelings, opinions, values and attitudes about their personal experiences and gives the participant a chance to elaborate further on insights. The interviews can range from structured to unstructured ranging from a set of specific questions to a general list of topics to possibly explore (Saldana, 2011).

Since it is important for this research to find out how and why students have certain feelings or made certain decisions, a semi-structured interview is the most sensible choice; the conversation can take many directions and are free to vary and is likely to change between participants (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). In contrast to a structured interview, this method is more suitable for this research topic since for a structured interview, a predetermined list of of questions are covered in the same order for each person; more like a questionnaire. According to Miles & Gilbert (2005, p. 66) *"less structured formats are well suited for social paradigms"* and will also provide a better format for discussing sensitive topics, which might arise asking students in Groningen about their personal situation and their rationale for moving to Groningen.

To get an answer to the sub-questions presented in section 1.2, semi-structured interviews are completed with eight participants. These participants are from China, and were organized through different connections such as my work; a combination of male and female was preferred with a range of Bachelor/Master students. The interviews took taking place over the course of a few days, to ensure enough time to analyse the data provided by the students. They were recorded on my laptop and transcribed to ensure all collected data was ready for analysis.

When participating in an interview location was a very important factor to consider as well as common ground. Which is why the preferred location that had been decided upon were the interview rooms inside the University Library. These are quiet, private rooms where there are no distractions and participants can speak freely.

3.2 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To get a better understanding of how Chinese students in Groningen see their lives here, and how they have created their own sense of home, the interviews take a semi-structured form. A base of trust was needed to be formed at the beginning of the interview so starting off with broader questions will be necessary to get a complete overview of the student.

The questions in appendix 7.1 formed the basis with other questions developing naturally while talking to the participants. To maintain at least a little consistency throughout the interview, a set of standard questions were asked, starting off with broader questions such as age, education and home city. Before recording is started, consent was asked to record and it was explained that names will be withheld from the interview and research project after which the questions according to the conceptual model were asked.

For *Nostalgic Illusion*, questions focused on cultural aspects from China that are still followed here (like traditions, food) and special belongings that might make them feel at home, that the students might have taken with them. Continuing with *Sense of Place*, the questions were more focused on their lives in Groningen; their fondest memories, friendships that are created here and adaptation to the Dutch culture. Intertwined with sense of place is *Place Attachment,* which focused more on their positive experiences in Groningen/the Netherlands, social activities and the emotional connection that they have made with Groningen through integration. Following, *Place Identity* was discussed in which the participant is asked how much they have in common with Groningen, has their daily life changed since they started living here, do they own any typical Dutch products (integration) and how is their hometown different than Groningen and how they feel about those differences. After these questions, closing questions are asked like what their future plans are and whether Groningen is a future place to live in.

These questions form the basis of the semi-structured interview. Any follow up questions that arose during the interview, were asked. Also, these questions were not posed in an order as some questions were already presented during the conversation.

3.3 ETHICAL PROBLEMS

The ethical issues that have arisen during this process were firstly ensuring the participants' anonymity. This was done by stating this to the participants before the interview started and asked their permission to record the interview. I also guaranteed them that this interview would not be used for any other purpose other than the research project, and would not be published anywhere and only kept for private records.

Secondly; the questions that were asked could have been delicate in nature. The questions stated might be considered intrusive into their personal lives. In this respect I had to be careful posing the questions and state them in a correct way, just as I had to respect the boundaries of the participants once they indicated that they did not want to respond. Just as the language barrier, the cultural background was also considered and being open to their own opinions; not judge them on any views they had.

3.4 DATA ANALYSES

Once the data had been retrieved, the interviews were transcribed using a transcribing software called *Expresscribe*; it makes it easier to slow down the audio file while typing. After transcribing, the interviews were coded, according to the codes used in 7.2 Codes used so that all parts that are of useful information, could be found quickly. This was done using *Atlas.TI*, a program that allows interviews to be coded and the information be put together in one overview; to make the results easier to interpret. The interview was coded according to the four different themes found in 2.6 Conceptual Model with a more detailed information found in 7.2 codes used for interview; nostalgic illusion, sense of place, place attachment and place identity. After the coding has been taken place, this was then transferred into a comprehensive conclusion, answering the sub-questions as stated in 1.2 research question.

3.5 DATA REFLECTION

The original goal was to interview twelve Chinese students but upon trying to contact this student population in Groningen it appeared a lot harder to find students willing to participate and take 45-60 minutes to talk to me. Upon reflection, eight students had been chosen to

interview. They were found through contacts at work but also acquaintances of the students that were already interviewed. I ended up having a research group of six women and two men, ranging from Bachelor to Master students, staying here for two to four years, and from different parts of China, as shown in 3.6 – Map of participants' origin. This gives a good overview of the research group and allowed me to get a view of the Chinese student population in Groningen and how they created a home here.

I also concluded that after the first three interviews, my questions were sometimes too difficult to understand for the students since I used some jargon and English terminology. Upon reflection, I changed some of the wording of the questions asked, trying not to change the nature of the questions too much and without directing the students into a particular answer. Sample saturation is another reason that led to choose only 8 interview participants. This concept is when no new information or themes are obtained from the interviews (Galvin, 2015). This point was reached around the fifth and sixth interview, after that the decision was made to put the cut off at 8 interviews, also due to the lack of Chinese students within my reach, willing to participate.

Amount of participants from China per province

Legend

No participants
Fujian, 3 participants
Heilongjiang, 1 participant
Sichuan, 3 participants
Zhejiang, 1 participant
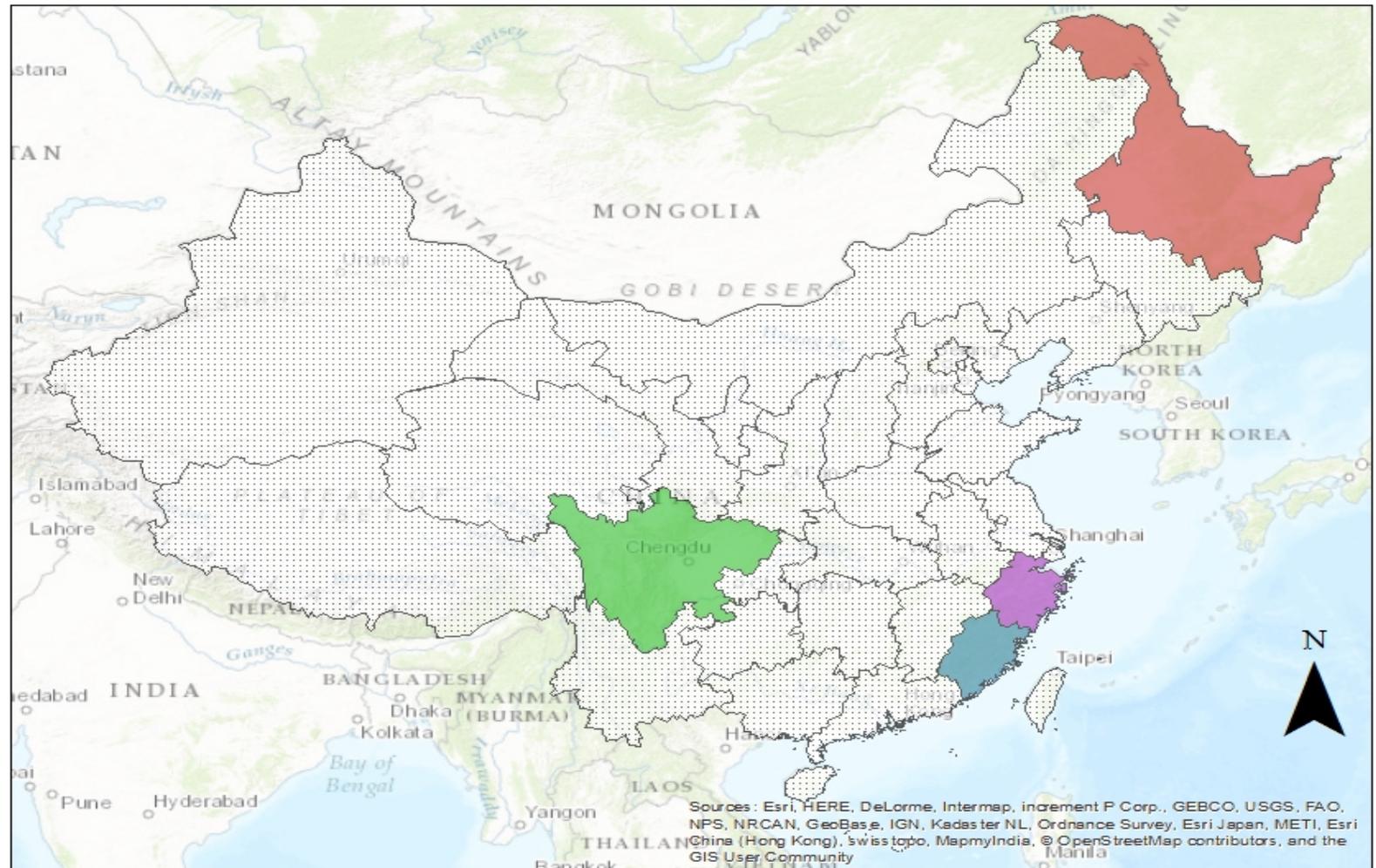
Sources: Esri, HERE, DeLorme, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), swisstopo, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

0   700   1.400   2.800 Kilometers

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting 8 interviews with Chinese students, ranging in age between 21-25, with an educational background from the Hanze Hogeschool to Rijksuniversiteit Groningen and the Conservatorium, a good sense of Chinese students living in Groningen, has been formed. In the following chapter the data gathered will be discussed in context of the theory. It will show the argument which will be reinforced with the aid of other sources as well as confirmed or contradicted by the interviews held. In the sub-sections the different concepts found in 2.6 theoretical framework will come forward.

4.1 WHAT IS A SENSE OF HOME?

As defined in 2. Theoretical framework, a sense of home is described as a multi facetted concept and can be traced back to many different ways – a daily routine, an emotional or symbolic connection to certain locations (Wiles, 2008), as well for the students to have the ability to fit in and interact with their new environment (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). As shown in 2.7 conceptual model, nostalgic illusion, sense of place, place attachment, place identity has been identified as the most influential factors when creating sense of home. Culture of food ties into this as it appears to be the overarching theme in all of the Chinese students' life, it is a continuous thread throughout their endeavours in Groningen and poses as a link to their home.

4.1.1 NOSTALGIC ILLUSION

Mobility can trigger a wanting for familiar culture and activities that gives someone a sense of belonging. This can emerge from going to restaurants and bars which recreate that feeling or recreating familiar past activities or maintaining certain customs (Kong, 1999). This applies to Chinese students in Groningen in a few different ways; first of all, the students all say they still celebrate their own cultural holidays, with Chinese New Year being the most important one since that is *"the big holiday to celebrate"* (Participant 1). This special holiday is celebrated with *"Chinese friends, we cook together and enjoy the food…"* (Participant 8) and will also watch *"the special TV show in China on YouTube…"* (Participant 7). Secondly, it comes forward in the friendships that the students create. They tend to have *"more Chinese friends because it's easier…"* (Participant 2) but also because *"the language is easier for us…and share our memories of China"* (Participant 3) and because *"East Asian friends are easier to have contact with…"* (Participant 6). Especially when first arriving into Groningen it was harder to *"communicate with local people…so it was more efficient to communicate*

with Chinese people…" (Participant 8). The necessity to remain close to their own language, similar culture and food is associated with the concept of bonding social capital, where a homogenous group has strong ties that are being reinforced, where 'outsiders' might even be excluded, or in this case – non-Asian students can be excluded.

When tying this in with their culture of food, it appears to be a big part of their daily integration into life in Groningen but also another way of feeling connected to familiar past activities. When they meet up with friends they go *"eating dinner at the restaurants…That it is a good memory…"* (Participant 7) and whenever they eat at home they eat *"traditional Chinese food, I eat it almost everyday…"* (Participant 8). They connect to their home country by bringing *"chopsticks and more kitchen stuff…"* (participant 2) especially when they first settle into a new city, like Groningen. One student brought her rice cooker since is the *"most important thing because our main course is rice…it is our appetite"* (Participant 5).

4.1.2 SENSE OF PLACE

The concept of a sense of place where the students create their identity within Groningen that allows the space to become a place (Hague & Jenkins, 2005). Within this concept, belongings from China play a significant role in anchoring in Groningen, according to Holton & Riley, 2005, as it can trigger a connection or a memory. After conducting the interviews, it has become clear that this does not go for Chinese students, as it seems that for all the students only practical belongings were brought to Groningen as one participant clearly states; *"I only brought… basic things I need in Groningen…"* (Participant 1) and they find they *"can buy everything they need in Holland… if I wanted to remind myself of China I can search the internet…"* (Participant 6). In this day and age, belongings don't seem as important since students find they can either search the internet to *"chat with my friends or look at pictures"* (Participant 2) or their computer which also contains *"pictures because I can …look online"* (Participant 5).

Within this sense of place, their food culture comes forward within their belongings they brought from China to Groningen. One participant *"only brought living things…and I brought some food…"* (Participant 1) whereas another finds the food *"not spicy enough…"* (participant 4) or when asked what they miss the most, the answer is *"food mostly and my family…"* (Participant 4). Their culture of food is such an important factor of their everyday lives, it is hard to change such intrinsic behaviour (Newman, 2004).

4.1.3 PLACE ATTACHMENT

Place attachment is about the positive experiences and the willingness to attach to a place (Devine – Wright, 2009). The interviewed students all have good memories of Groningen and according to some; *"I made new friends which I really like"* (Participant 1) and *"have some Dutch friends I want to spend time with"* (Participant 2). When asked if Groningen could

ever be considered a home for them they stated that *"belongings don't make me feel at home"* (Participant 1) which another participant concurred by stating that Groningen is *"not a home for me because my parents aren't here…"* (Participant 5). Family is an important part of Chinese culture; it is a relationship of reciprocity where adult children give back to their parents for raising them (Chu & Yu, 2010).

Place attachment arises from the length of residency and social belonging (Hernandez *et al.,* 2007*)*. The length of residency in this research paper could be problematic since they are all short term students and only staying in Groningen for a period of two to four years. This affected their willingness to stay in Groningen longer as well as the importance of family. Social belonging is different as most participants have appeared to make *"friends and have fun with them while it lasts…"* (Participant 5).

4.1.4 PLACE IDENTITY

When looking at place identity it is about the emotional connection to a place and where the students want to stay, feel comfortable and have a sense of security (Devine – Wright, 2009). Chinese students appear to be more practical with decisions rather than emotional. They feel like Groningen is their hometown *"because I have stayed here for a long time and I feel safe here…"* (Participant 2) but prefer to move *to "Amsterdam because they have more opportunities"* (Participant 6). Some consider *"Groningen to be my second home…"* (Participant 2) but consider the culture experience a *"good opportunity…and I can also use in my future career…I can take advantage of knowing the culture…"* (Participant 8). Over time, a sense of security has been developed, which helped by creating an identity within Groningen, but it is also about commonality with a place.

Place identity is also about establishing what the person has in common with that place (Hague & Jenkinks, 2005) which mainly is that Groningen is *"small and the population is not as big so it's less crowded…"* (Participant 3) but also that it is *"more relaxing…"* (Participant 6) and feel like their hometown is *"too crowded…"* (Participant 4). It can almost be connected to a (rural) idyll that has been created by these students in how they perceive Groningen compared to their hometowns where Groningen is the calmer and peaceful countryside with fresh air and lots of space (Woods, 2005).

4.2 HOW CAN A SENSE OF HOME BE PLACED WITHIN A TEMPORARY HOME?

When a sense of home is put into a temporary situation, Chow & Healey (2008) suggest that this can alter the identity of the person being put into the temporary situation as people try to adapt to new surroundings and cultures. According to Cheung *et al* (2005), Chinese people

tend to be subtler when explaining or discussing something, whereas western culture prefer a more direct way. When asking the participants how they have changed since they started living in Groningen, their most stated answer was that had to get used to the direct way of speaking of the Western society, stating that they *"find the direct way more efficient"* (participant 8), thus a way of adapting to the Dutch culture and creating a sense of place attachment through alteration of behaviour. One participant states that their biggest adaptation to Dutch culture was speaking in a *"direct way…because I had problems with roommates and had to express my ideas…"* (Participant 5).

Nostalgic illusion shows how mobility can trigger a wanting for a familiar culture by recreating past activities like celebrating Chinese New Year (Kong, 1999). This also comes back in having social gatherings with similar cultures. Correspondingly, for the Chinese students in Groningen, they *"draw more towards [their] Chinese friends because they understand [them] and speak the same or similar language"* (Participant 2). Similarly, with creating a sense of place, where the students feel at home in Groningen due to social interactions they have, whether it be with students of similar or different cultural backgrounds.

In one way the students have adapted to Western culture by becoming blunter in their conversations but at the same time find it more comforting to be around students of similar culture because *"we have the same problems that we can talk about and also share the same food…"* (participant 2). It is also due to the fact that when having Chinese friends, they can share *"experiences of China with them and memories…"* (Participant 3). One student found that she has more Asian friends due to a *"similar background as Asian students are more reserved and quiet…"* (Participant 8) which makes it easier for her to make friends from Asia instead of European friends from Germany or the Netherlands.

4.3 WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN CREATING A SENSE OF HOME?

As stated above, there are several factors of importance when creating a sense of home like nostalgic illusion, sense of place, place attachment and place identity. The most important factors, that can be concluded from the interviews are *food culture*, *nostalgic illusion* and *place attachment*.

The food culture in China is, according to Newman (2004, p.11), how Chinese people find *"connections to past, place and people"*. The Chinese students, creating a home in Groningen, incorporate food into their daily life and activities. This ties in with a nostalgic illusion, where they recreate their traditions and culture similar to China. Where the interviewed students all agree that the *"only activity is going to clubs and drink…"* (Participant 2). In China they prefer to go to *"…karaoke and eating… we spend a lot of time*

eating…" (Participant 5).   Similarly, many have chosen to bring chopsticks to Groningen, the reason for that being *"I can only eat with chopsticks, I can't live without them…"* (Participant 4) even though it is just *"more convenient to bring…"* (Participant 4). It shows how big the cultural difference is between the students. Another students explains her parents were very worried about her moving to Groningen, because she *"cannot cook by myself in China…my family was very worried…because I couldn't take care of myself…"* (Participant 8).

Where students settling here find it easier to have Asian friends, not only to recreate a sense of belonging they felt in China but also because the *"language is easier for us…"* (Participant 3) and also because the language barrier of learning Dutch is higher as *"most Dutch people can speak English…"* (Participant 1). This ties in together with place attachment where it is harder for the students to develop positive experiences outside their own culture because they *"draw more towards [their] Chinese friends…"* (Participant 2) since many students feel misunderstood but also because they have a *"similar language…"* (Participant 2). Where the 'positive affective state of psychological comfort derived from feeling at ease, familiar…' (Aroian, 1990, p. 8) is achieved by the students whom have been here longer as they feel *"familiar here and I feel safety…"* (Participant 2) they all still choose not to settle here, for practical reasons such as the career opportunities that lack, especially in Groningen.

4.4 HOW DOES CREATING A SENSE OF HOME INFLUENCE THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE STUDENTS?

The community of Chinese students here in Groningen do try to adapt to Dutch culture by trying the food and state that they *"like kibbeling and haring…"* (Participant 2). They also state that feeling like they can find their way home after class or other activities allows them to feel at home as well. Creating a sense of home is possibly not the motivation for Chinese students to come and live here as they all have a focus on the future. The reason for moving here, mostly constitutes of *"the agency said it was a good environment to study…"* (Participant 7) but also because the *"universities in China are easier than high school…"* (Participant 5). One participant is staying in Groningen for her Masters Degree because *"staying in Groningen is easier…education is more important…"* (Participant 4).

Their reasoning is practical – staying in Groningen is not an option because the job opportunities are not that great, especially because they don't speak Dutch. In China they have more job opportunities when they have finished internships elsewhere even though they mostly prefer Groningen over their hometown, mainly due to their hometown being *"less crowded and people are in general very friendly"* (Participant 3) but also because they *"enjoy the weather…"* (Participant 4).

5. CONCLUSIONS

An extension of community is a sense of home; this research paper focused on the Chinese student community in Groningen where eight participants were interviewed and asked questions about their lives in Groningen which helped to answer the question of how **Chinese students created a sense of home during their stay in Groningen**. A community is an extension of self and the home where a feeling of belonging can be created to evolve to a sense of home (Cuba & Hummon, 1993, Cicognani *et al.*, 2011.

To some extent, all students have created a sense of home in Groningen but within their own community where they feel safe, secure and free to express themselves. Bonding social capital is key in defining these relationships which they have built during their stay in Groningen. A sense of home, defined for Chinese students is where their parents and friends are, where they can communicate and be understood, which is traced back to how they create a sense of home in Groningen; through finding friends with similar backgrounds and celebrating similar holiday. A vast part of this is their culture of food, which poses as the line which binds them not only to each other, but also to their home. It is integrated into every aspect of their life; traditions, friends, celebrations and comfort. Where belongings aren't as important to these students, food seems to be more so; traditions like Chinese New Year, outings with friends are at restaurants and if belongings are taken back to Groningen it is food, to make their stay here more comfortable, more home-like.

In a temporary context, students have adapted to Dutch culture in some ways; by becoming blunter in their way of speaking or growing into the culture but on the other hand; bonding social capital plays a role where the students remain very focused on their own culture and language; a more comfortable place for them to be at, where food is similar and shared and a connection can be made over memories of China.

The factors that impact the students' life the most, when creating a sense of home, are found to be the nostalgic illusion, place attachment and furthermost significant; food culture. Nostalgic illusion is found in traditional holiday's still celebrated which recreate the feeling of being at home (Kong, 1999). Place attachment is more so connected to the duration of their stay; when being here for two-four years, the students have developed some sense of security within their own social realm of other Chinese students. Food culture is a returning factor in all aspect which is why it is considered to be the most influential factor.

Creating a sense of home is possibly not the first priority for Chinese students living in Groningen. They do create a sense of home through creating connections to their home in China through a food culture that is vastly present throughout most their lives, which is continued in Groningen. As well as creating a sense of community, and thus a sense of home, by staying close to their own cultural affiliations which presents a stable home for Chinese students in a Groningen.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research recommendations, would start of with possibly getting a larger sample size than only eight Chinese students in Groningen. Generalising is very difficult when the respondent size is this small; a larger sample size might increase the possibility of finding a clearer pattern. Even broadening the respondent group to not only Chinese students in Groningen but also to more cosmopolitan cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam. These might present the data with different processes where career opportunities are not only better but the resident body is more diverse and services that may be more appointed to their taste and easier access to their own culture.

Another recommendation for further research would be to add a second method of data collection such as a visual representation of their rooms or of their perception of where or what their 'home' is in Groningen. This could help with creating a clearer image of what exactly makes a home for the students here and what effect that has had on their life.

Lastly, the food culture that was deemed important during the interviews could be the base for a more in-depth research about how this impacts and influences student culture and life of Chinese students – not limited to the Netherlands.

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7. APPENDIX

7.1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Age
2. Education
3. What is your home city in China?
4. Are you here for short term or long term stay?
5. What is your housing situation at the moment? (Apartment, living together in a student house, with roommates (where are they from?) etc.).

Nostalgic illusion

1. Have you taken any special belongings from China that connect you to your home (town)?
    a. What memories do these belongings bring back for you? Any specific ones that you're particularly fond of?
    b. Do these belongings make it easier for you to settle here?
2. What customs from your culture/family do you still follow here in Groningen?
    a. Traditions
    b. Food
    c. Friends
3. Was there a difference for you when you just arrived in Groningen and where you are now? Have you changed any customs/behaviours/traditions?
    a. Why was it hard to keep up the traditions?
    b. How do you keep these traditions going in such a different environment?

Sense of place

1. What are your feelings about Groningen? What are your fondest memories to date?
2. Have you formed any special friendships/relationships while here in the Netherlands?
    a. Does surrounding yourself with Chinese friends, give you more of a feeling of being 'at home'?
3. How has that made Groningen more of a home for you?
    a. How have you tried to make Groningen your home? Is it the personal belongings, friends, family?
    b. If you don't feel at home; how has this influenced your life here? Study results, shortening length of stay, changing house?
4. Have you tried adapting to the culture? (Food – customs, traditions, special holidays)
    a. Are you learning to speak Dutch?

Place attachment

1. What is your fondest memory, so far, of living in the Netherlands?
2. How has your duration of your stay influenced how you 'live' here? how has that influenced your willingness to attach to Groningen – have you decided to emerge yourself into the city, culture etc.?
3. Have you participated in any social activities in Groningen?
4. Do you try to integrate into the student life in Groningen by joining your study association or any other associations?

Place identity

1. How has your daily life changed since you started living in Groningen?
2. Do you own any typical Dutch things that you are particularly fond of?
    a. Bike?
    b. Apartment?
    c. Belongings?
3. What do you like about Groningen that differs from your home town?
    a. Do you have a preference for Groningen or your home town?

Closing questions

1. What are your future plans?
2. Is Groningen a possible place for you to live in?
3. Do you have any remarks to add?

7.2 CODES USED FOR INTERVIEWS

Codes	Interpretations
Age	Age – to get a clear overview of the target group
Education	Education – to see whether the students are bachelor/master students – duration of their stay in Groningen
Housing situation	To create an overview of what their living situation is; with international students, alone, with whom they live
Nostalgic illusion	Connections to China; cultural, family, friends, belongings
Sense of place	Emotions that certain places might recall – fond memories of Groningen that have been created, adaptation to the culture
Place attachment	Their willingness to attach to Groningen, how they have created a place for themselves within Groningen and how the students have integrated into the Groningen socially
Place identity	How do the students identify with Groningen – are there any similarities between their hometown and Groningen that they feel comfortable with? Have they tried to identify with Groningen by owning typical Dutch belongings?